XIO3

GCACE

Garden City Atari Computer Enthusiasts
1003 Amphion St. Victoria, B.C. Canada V8S 4G2

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ATARI®
NEWS AND RUMOURS

by Rowland Grant

Readers will recall that on July 30, 1996 Atari Corp took over disk drive maker JTS, and assumed the name JTS. The new company's Atari division was allowed to wither away, all money being invested in the production of hard drives. On February 23, 1998, JTS sold all the remaining assets of its Atari division to a subsidiary of Hasbro. On December 4, 1998, JTS filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. It's no surprise. The world market for hard drives is extremely competitive. Even the market leaders are seeing losses. I recall that the reverse merger of Atari and JTS was an effort by the Tramiels and their friends to save the value of their insider stock. The gamble seems to have failed.

Of course Atari lives on as a trade name. New arcade game machines are still being made under the Atari label. And Hasbro is beginning to offer remakes of the old Atari games, all issued with the Atari logo. Hasbro was interested only in Atari game titles and copyrights. However it seems to have suddenly realized that by taking on all of the Atari assets it could also assume certain liabilities. The Battlesphere game for the Atari Jaguar game machine is the first case. 4Play, the producers of Battlesphere, have no connection with Hasbro. However, before they can make a game cartridge for the Jaguar the code must be encrypted. Hasbro has the encryption code, and must give approval to 4Play to encrypt the game. Hasbro may approve, but only when they are sure of their legal position. Hasbro is concerned that buyers of Battlesphere and future Jaguar games may believe Hasbro is involved and demand service, redress etc. And the act of giving approval for encryption could make them legally liable for the Jaguar games encrypted.

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are $25 per family per year. Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter, access to over 5000 8-bit public domain disks and 210 ST disks in our library and literally thousands of 8-bit and ST PD files on various CDs.

MEETINGS

Meetings will be held in the Nellie McClung branch of the Library at 3950 Cedar Hill Road (corner of McKenzie) on the fourth Thursday of each month. All meetings are at 7 pm. There is no meeting in the month of December.

EDITORIAL

At a recent meeting Craig Carmichael passed around many copies of a photograph he took at a previous meeting. He wished to show the latest feats his operating system OASES could perform. He took the photo with a digital camera and then printed them using OASES and a colour printer. He used different resolutions and dithering on each printout, so some are better than others, but all are at least acceptable and clear. A couple are even printed on glossy photo paper and look like actual photographs. There were only 21 prints made, so a couple of you will not receive the pictures, but at last our corresponding members will be finally be able to put faces to some of the reprobates in our club.

Gord

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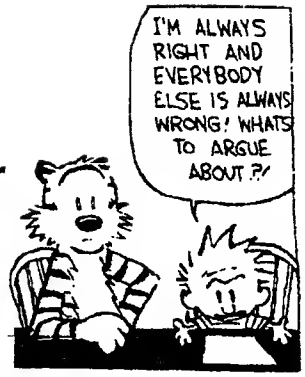
Commodore Amiga	Ted Skrecky	598-6173
IBM's and clones	Rowland Grant	598-3661
	Ted Skrecky	598-6173\
	John Picken	598-2386

PEEKing Around



by Gordon F. Hooper

...Welcome to new member CHRIS GRIFFITHS, who has an ST. For those of you with a PC or Mac as a backup computer, Chris works at the Langford Gizmo's store, so if you're looking for used equipment, give him a call. Renewing was DANE STEGMAN, our corresponding member from Akron, New York. This entitles you to 5 free PD disks, Dane, so if you need anything, be sure to write... TED SKRECKY is going to be banished out of the meeting room into the library in the near future if he continues playing his mindless games while the meeting is in progress. Or perhaps I should take a cue from the games he loves so much and bring an AK47. That way, as soon as he disrupts a meeting, I could open fire and solve the problem permanently. It takes 42 muscles to frown, but only 4 to pull the trigger of a decent sniper rifle. You've been warned, CyberPunk... NOEL BLACK has been feeling well enough to start attending meetings again, welcome back, Noel... CLIFF BOUVETTE came to the rescue with another 14.4 FAX modem when mine went on the blink. Turned out the only problem with mine was that the power supply was shot, but nothing goes to waste in Atari Land. I took a power supply from my 8-bit 1050 disk drive and it worked fine. JOHN PICKEN is now using the extra 14.4... I got the new mylar for my TT's keyboard, and it works fine except the space bar doesn't work. Unlessloverlookthisfact,whichdoesn'tseempractical, I'll still have to use BRUCE FUNKS' Mega ST keyboard. Thanks, Bruce... The people who are responsible for putting out this newsletter have adopted a laissez faire attitude. It will still be produced, but we will not hold to a strict deadline anymore. Life's too short... Enough of this drivel, here's a couple of jokes...

FAMOUS DOG QUOTES

"If your dog is fat, you aren't getting enough exercise" -- Unkown.

"In dog years, I'm dead." -- Unknown.

"I loathe people who keep dogs. They are cowards who haven't got the guts to bite people themselves." -- August Strindberg

"My dog is worried about the economy because Alpo is up to 99 cents a can. That's almost $7.00 in dog money." -- Joe Weinstein

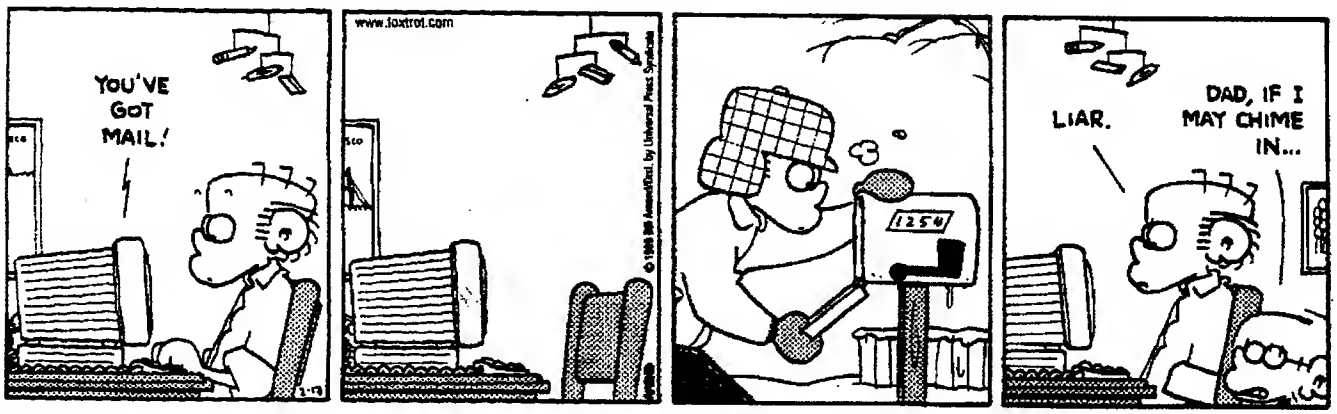
"If I have any beliefs about immortality, it is that certain dogs I have known will go to heaven, and very, very few persons." -- James Thurber

"Women and cats will do as they please, and men and dogs should relax and get used to the idea." -- Robert A. Heinlein

"Cat's motto: No matter what you've done wrong, always try to make it look like the dog did it." -- Unknown...

Down in the dumps? Dig up some dirt on fellow members and tell GORD at 475-0857. You might as well make everybody else miserable too...

FOX TROT



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Other Jaguar games seem to be possible. OMC Games recently released a non-interactive demo of the Assassin for specially modified Jaguars using the official Jaguar development kit. This demo was intended to show that they have the skills to create a Jaguar game. The Assassin is an role playing game set in the future. An interactive demo has just been released, but the graphics needs work. OMC is still looking for an artist to help in the project. Also Ville Jdrvi has been assembling an online team to make an Atari Jaguar shoot 'em up. He is still looking for new members who can code in C or assembler, do graphic arts or even do sound and music. Ville is in Finland. Making computer games nowadays is like making movies. Teams of specialists, artists and musicians are needed.

"JagFest '99 -- Celebrate Atari" is to be held in Rochester, MN on June 18, 1999. Carl Forhan, a developer for the Lynx and Jaguar, has agreed to host this year's events. These include a Protector demo for the Jaguar, BattleSphere head-to-head competitions, and demos of other unreleased games.

For years Dana Jacobson and Joe Mirando edited Atari news for STReport, an online magazine. When Atari left the scene, the name changed to Silicon Times Review and dealt with all computers, particulary PC computers. Dana and Joe soldiered on with Atari affairs and general game console news. Now they have set up their own magazine called Atari Online News Etc, or AONE. It is very much like their old sections in STR with some general computer news added. More power to 'em.

VM labs is full of former Atari employees. It has produced the very advanced NUON chipset for graphics and sound. Jeff Minter is developing Tempest 3000, the arcade game to run under the NUON system. I notice that Sony has announced that it will be releasing a new game system using its own chipset. It is rumoured to have much the same capabilities as the NUON. It's a tough market.

Benjy Collins reports that Application Systems Heidelberg (ASH) has issued a new newsletter in which they list upgrades for just about everything. MagiC for Atari computers is now at version 6.1, as is MagiC Mac. There are new versions of Jinnee, artworx, Papyrus etc. They have updated the printer drivers included with NVDI 5.02. Also they claim that the new MagiC PC 6.1 will now run ST programs two to three times faster on a PC than previously. And MagiC 6.1 for Milan computers should be available by the end of March.

... software is readily available in Western Europe. Of course Atari sold far more computers in Germany than the U.S.

All this software is readily available in Western Europe. It is not always available in North America. Of course Atari sold far more computers in Germany than in the U.S. And there is still a much larger market for TOS related software and hardware in Germany than over here. The Milan computer is available in Western Europe but not here. Perhaps the hassle of getting approval from the FCC for the Milan to be sold in the U.S. could be more trouble than it is worth. Anyway, there are reports that the Milan developers are working hard on TOS 5.0 to replace Mint and other software currently bundled with the Milan. When the new TOS is finished it could be ported to the TT and Falcon. TOS 5.0 will have glow icons. According to Milan these are the most innovative and beautiful icons available on any platform today. The desktop replacement "Thing" (renamed Ming) will be the standard. There is a new window look, the bars will be smaller with optimized 3D effects. There will be a new CPX protocol, long filenames, VFAT32 compatibility, and hard drive partitions up to 127 GigaBytes.

Alexander Clauss, the creator of the popular Crystal Atari Browser, is now developing iCAB for Power PC Macintosh computers. He has put a demo of iCAB on his Web page. This has generated a great deal of favourable interest among Mac users. The new iCAB draws upon the resources of the Mac to handle Java, Javascript and other internet technologies unavailable to TOS computers.

Thomas Much, author of the spread sheet TEXEL! for TOS computers, has announced that Texel 2.2 is to be released (by ASH) this month. English and French translations are to follow shortly. He has completely rewritten the parser for much more advanced text string handling. A complete implementation of this feature will not be available until later this year.

A couple of years ago MGI Software Corp developed Calamus Publisher for Windows 95/98. They released the Windows version along with an updated version of Calamus for TOS computers. Now MGI is suspending further work on Calamus Publisher. Sales of Calamus for Windows have been modest. However, MGI's other software titles have been selling very well. In two years, MGI shipped twelve million copies of its PhotoSuite, and

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VideoWave software, and have some 44 percent market share of consumer photo software. MGI has wisely decided to concentrate on success and specialize in photo, video and television oriented software. They have already established partnerships with companies in the photo industry. Intel Corporation has invested in MGI and has entered into agreements with it. Fortunately MGI licensed the rights to develop Calamus for TOS computers to Invers Software Vertrieb in Germany. Invers has just updated its printer driver package that comes with Calamus 98. Invers produces drivers for most of the popular current printers. For instance there is a complete driver package that supports the latest Epson 800 series printers.

There is a rumour that Tempus Word Pro is still being developed. According to Dennis Vermeire the last upgrade was version 2.92 in 1996. Tempus is a popular, very fast text editor. It was made over into a word processor in 1989 with many advanced features. Tempus Word Pro, still very fast, now has a built in database, options to print to three printers at once and the ability to use Calamus fonts. Unfortunately Tempus Word Pro is available in German only.

Siegfried Hartmann has announced that CoMa 4.9.0 is now available. CoMa is a fax and voice-mail system for TOS computers or TOS emulators on the PC or Mac. CoMa is available as shareware. It has far too many features to list here. It comes with English documentation. Erik Hall (Sweden) has announced the release of a new version of MyMAIL (0.79). And Nima Montaser of Homa Systems House (Canada) reports that his ScanX software will work with all the current Microtek and UMAX SCSI scanners. For price and performance, Nima recommends the UMAX ASTRA 1220S scanner with ScanX PRO software.

Atari Computing magazine has released "Renegade CD". This CD contains the commercial Apex Intro version 2.41, two full versions of Thing 1.09, Kandinsky 2.5, Adresse, Edith Pro and many other current shareware releases. There are also text and HTML versions of *Atari Computing* magazine back issues and all the reader disks. This CD can be obtained from *Atari Computing* for 15.95 UKp plus postage.

Mario Becroft of New Zealand has designed a number of very useful upgrades for our old TOS computers. Abingdon Synthesis Projects is Mario's UK agent. They have names for his products now. MouseBurster is an interface that converts a standard PC serial mouse to an Atari mouse. There is no special software to run, just some jumper switches to determine the type and speed of the mouse. It retails in the UK at 19 UKp. SCSI-Burster is a cable that turns a PC case into a SCSI case. Up to seven devices (non-SCSI I presume) can be supported. It works well with ICD Link type interfaces. A basic three-device cable costs 18 UKp. PSU-Burster is the name for a new family of cables that allows the use of PC power supply units for Atari ST's and Falcon's. There are no modifications required to either the power supply or the motherboard, and they cost 6.5 UKp. IDE-Burster is a suite of cables to allow the use of 3.5" form-factor drives with the Falcon. Lots of options are available but the basic single device cable, to squeeze a 3.5" drive into a Falcon internally, costs 8 UKp. STartIDE FM is an IDE interface that fits inside a STFM, it comes with an optional TOS 2.06 upgrade. STartIDE supports 3.5" and 2.5" hard drives and standard IDE CDROM's. It should work with LS-120 drives too. It is possible to get a 2.5" hard-drive into a STFM without modifying the external case. The basic StartIDE interface costs 50 UKp. Also there is a special STE version of STartIDE. Coming soon are the following: a keyboard interface for PC keyboards, a 4MB RAM card for the STFM, a ST to VGA converter and an accelerator for the ST. The accelerator uses a Motorola 68030, has TT fast RAM and interfaces for IDE devices and VGA monitors.

I notice that someone at the Toronto Atari Federation has received a demonstration model of Mario Becroft's new ST to VGA convertor. It's a small adaptor that plugs into the ST's monitor socket. The VGA monitor is plugged into the adapter. According to TAF, the adapter worked very well. Hm, I notice that my Macintosh Quadra has a plug-in adapter for VGA. At last we have something for the ST. Not mentioned was the kind of VGA monitor that the interface will handle. If we have to find a multisync monitor with a low frequency range, like an older NEC, then Dennis Vermeire has an alternate suggestion. Dennis has one of the new TV tuners that can output to a VGA monitor. Dennis reports that he connected the RF port of his ST to one of these tuners and got the best ST colour that he had ever seen.

Martin-Eric Racine reports that he has found a manufacturer willing to produce a batch of Ethernet cards that use the Lance technology. These plug into the VME bus in the Mega STE or the TT. The manufacturer used to make these cards, but discontinued production some time ago. If Martin can collect about 100 purchase orders, the Ethernet cards could be available for a very reasonable price. Since Lance technology drivers for MiNTnet and STinG are already available, it would be easy to instal an Ethernet card in a MEGA-STE or a TT.

And finally, the millennium bug is back. Will we ever be free of it? Atari users were congratulating themselves that TOS based computers neatly avoided the this bug. TOS uses 7 bits for the year which allows it to count up to 127. To this is added the starting date of 1980. So the ST should count up to 2107 AD before it goes back to 1980. However Philip Taylor reports that he cannot enter any year in the range 00-27 on his STE. Checking this, David Bolt tried a roll-over from

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Same Old Same Old

by Rowland Grant

Our Annual General Meeting re-elected all of the members of the executive committee to their previous positions. Gordon Hooper gave the details in his Peeking Around column in the January/February issue. The assembled company approved the annual financial report. This was duly signed by myself and Gordon. It was attached to the required forms and deposited with the registrar of societies, along with twenty five bucks. So we are a legal corporate body for another year. Our corporate body is slowly wasting away. We are down to 27 members, but as long as there is an interest in Atari computers we will stick together.

The February general meeting featured our annual swap and shop. There were all sorts of goodies changing hands, hardware and software. I bought only a few trifles this time, mainly because my attic is running out of storage space for Atari things. Since nobody was requesting copies from the library, Ted Skrecky decided to try Hellgate, a new Doom type shoot-em-up for the ST. While Gordon was trying to run the formal part of the meeting, his comments were being interrupted by shots and loud screams as Ted was dealing with Hellgate's monsters.

Craig Carmichael has been developing his OASES operating system and associated application software for some years now. OASES is quite powerful and versatile. Unlike Windows or Apple's OS 8 or UNIX, OASES is quite compact. It will run on a standard ST. However OASES really shines on more powerful computers with higher resolution VGA colour monitors. OASES could be made to run on any contemporary computer platform. So rather than depending on Windows or other operating systems, one could attach application software (or games for that matter) to the compact OASES core which will run the software independently. While this software is running, Windows (or whatever) could still be present and available. In this way OASES could make any software independent of the resident operating system or computer platform. There are limitations to this approach of course, but OASES could add considerable flexibility and economy to software production. Craig's ideas merit much more consideration and discussion than I have room for in this column.

Intent on a recent meeting demonstration are (from left to right) Cliff Bouvette, Rowland Grant, Ted Skrecky and Bruce Funk.

8-Bit

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Curt has also some photos of the rumoured 1600XL 8-bit system. Curt Vendel mentioned that he interviewed three of the people who designed the Commodore Vic-20 and C-64. They admitted that Jack Tramiel had them look at the Atari 800, and copy its features into a lower cost computer. One feature they never copied was the SIO bus which allowed the daisy chaining of peripheral devices from a single interface. The SIO bus was years ahead of its time. Only now is the USB bus idea catching on. In fact the designer of the SIO bus for the Atari 800 is also one of the patent holders of the USB design. At present he works for Microsoft (groan).

Obviously Atari had a number of very talented hardware designers when development of the Atari 800 began. Later, when Warner bought the company and the suits took over, the good designers left. The new products suffered. This was especially evident in the video circuits of the XL series. Larry White decided to try the Super Video upgrade to fix his XL. He clipped out one capacitor mentioned in the upgrade and tested the result. There was an enormous improvement in the video. Why did the Atari designers add that component? Did they not do any breadboard testing? It's all so sad.

Alan Sharkis, editor of Ol' Hackers newsletter and general 8-bit guru, has announced that he will be leaving the Atari 8-bit world in December 1999. Alan explained that he is secretary of another club (Long Island Atari User Group). Some of its members are considering reorganizing to form a new group devoted to LINUX. Alan would like to be part of that, and devote all his computer time (and space) to LINUX. The advanced notice is to allow someone to take over Alan's duties as editor, and get familiar with the software and routines. I hope that someone in Ol' Hackers will volunteer.

Rumours

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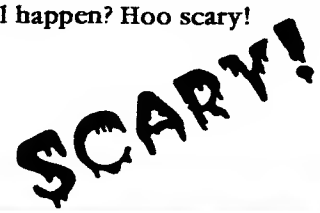
1999/12/31 to 2000/1/1. Before a reboot his STE had the correct date. After the reboot, it read 2028/01/01. This is with TOS 1.62 and Magic 5.11. He failed in his attempts to enter a date between 2000 and 2028. Philip Taylor reported his subsequent experiments using his STE with TOS 2.06. He tried setting the date with the XBIOS command "settime" and reading it back with "gettime". These experiments seem to confirm his view that the keyboard clock (Motorola 6301) in the STE does not allow the year 2000 to be set. Of course, the date can also be set using GEMDOS, and everyone agrees that this seems to behave as expected. Maybe the STE is trying to tell us something? Is it telling us to ignore all years between 2000 and 2028? Why? What will happen? Hoo scary!



DILBERT

What's Old Is New Again!

by Rowland Grant

Atari Classics magazine is down to one issue a year. There has been some comment that the magazine is finished. However Bob Woolley is not prepared to give up yet. He devoted two weeks to working on projects for the magazine, but he says that it is still not close to production.

Is there software that can connect Atari 8-bit to the web? As far as is known, there is no PPP software for any 6502 based computer. However at least one programmer thinks that it may be feasible. A text-based web browser is under development (project PHOENIX). The beta version may be out in March this year. If PHOENIX is successful, there are plans to have it distributed in cartridge form by Video 61 (the new owner of BBS Express).

Crystalware Inc created a number of popular games for the Atari 8-bit, such as Sands of Mars, Galactic Quest, Beneath the Pyramids etc. John Bell, still president and chief game designer of Crystalware, has announced that his company will be re-entering the gaming market. They will re-issue the old game titles, but with high resolution 3-D graphics and fully interactive environments. This must be for the contemporary PC or Mac markets where there seems to be a need for good game plots. Crystalware is offering free downloads of their old Atari 8-bit games.

Crystalware is not the only company that has gone over to the PC market. Alan Reeve admits that REEVEsoft is now working on Windows software. Alan mentioned that back in 1988, Atari Corp talked in public about bundling Alan's Diamond Graphic Operating System cartridge with the Atari XE computers. But according to Alan, "that was just a PR move to make it look like they cared about the 8-bit market. We even gave Sig Hartman 5 samples at the World of Atari show in '88, never to hear another word." I seem to recall that Commodore had bundled a graphic operating system (GEOS?) and mouse with the 64c. Atari may have been toying with the idea of putting out a competing product.

The SIO bus for the Atari 8-bit was designed by the same man who also holds a patent for the (new?) USB design.

Edward Williams reports that he has upgraded a number of Atari 600XLs to 256K of RAM, and used them as industrial controllers at a very low cost. Through a SIO to IDE adapter he has connected 200MB hard drives and CD ROMs to the 600XLs. The adapter is a card that plugs into the SIO port and drives standard IDE devices. It is a smart card that makes the IDE devices seem like SIO floppy drives to the Atari computer. Edward even wrote a special DOS (called Ed-DOS) for greater flexibility. It is similar to Sparta DOS in function. Unfortunately, this is a private project with a special purpose, and Edward does not intend to sell the card or give away the design.

Steven Posey has again raised the question of new text adventure games in the Infocom format for Atari and other 8-bit computers. The freeware Inform compiler creates Z-code games in Z5 Infocom format. Unfortunately the 8-bits will only run games in Z3 format. Some time ago Tom Hunt posted a number of new games that he had recompiled from Z5 to Z3 format. He has not yet explained how this was done. The reason for the Z5 format was to handle games up to 256K. However most games are 128K or less, which fits the Z3 format easily. The original Zork trilogy were only 90K each. Steven says that he has about 45 new games in Z5 format that could easily fit the Z3 format for 8-bit computers. Unfortunately, even Tom Hunt's converted games may not available now as his Closer to Home web site is down, at least for the time being.

While Atari never sold any colour monitors for its 8-bit computers, one was in development after the Tramiels took over the company. Mike Stulir reports that he has a prototype. Called the XC1411, the composite colour monitor looked like the SC1224 made by Goldstar for the ST line. It has two RCA connectors, probably for composite video and sound. Mike says that the colour quality is very good. Looking at my SC1224, I notice that it has pins for composite video and sound in addition to the RGB analog colour input. Maybe the XC1411 was a modified SC1244. If so, there might be room for experimentation here.

Curt Vendel announced that he has pictures of the Atari Sierra 68000 Project prototype taken in 1983. Atari was working in secret on a successor to its 8-bit series of computers. This computer was based on the Motorola M68000 CPU and used an advanced chipset codenamed "Silver and Gold".

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GAME REVIEW

HELLGATE!

by Ted Skrecky

Late one night at MicroSoft HQ a phone was ringing in the office of Bill Gates. Bill picked-up the phone and said "hello". An urgent-sounding voice on the other end of the line blurted-out "Sir, this is General Killmore from the Pentagon." Gates growled, "Killmore, how many times have I told you to never phone me at the office!" "But sir, this is of vital importance," said the General, "Our orbital spy satellites have detected an object approaching the Earth at great velocity." "Have you determined if it is a Windows 98 compliant object?", said Gates. "Sir, the object does not conform to anything in the Microsoft database and our Internet Explorer software has completely failed to establish a communications link-up," was the reply. Gates grumbled, "This failure to communicate can only mean one thing.... the object must have been constructed by one of our blacklisted competitors. You know what to do.... destroy it!!" "But sir, only the Star Wars defence network could destroy it and only the President of the United States of America can authorize such an action," stammered General Killmore. "Killmore!!!, who do you obey!" bellowed Gates. "Only you, mein Fuehrer" came the submissive response. "I will fake receiving orders from the President and launch the attack and will phone you back when I can confirm the object's destruction".

Twenty minutes later the phone rang again in Bill Gates office. A sinister smile momentarily crossed Gates's face. He reached for the phone and picked it up. "Mein Fuehrer, I have failed you." the General said in a whimpering voice. "All of the laser blasts from our defense satellites have been deflected off the object and one of the deflected shots has atomized the moon. All I can say is the object stayed in Earth's orbit only long enough to transmit an uuencoded message onto the Internet. The CIA is always constantly scanning all of the Internet and they immediately detected a sudden increase in traffic on all Atari newsgroups, mailing lists and Web sites. They have informed me that the uuencoded message appears to be a demo of a new game called Hellgate and it will only run on Atari ST computers."

Bill Gates's face turned a crimson colour. His eyes bulged-out of their sockets and smoke began to belch-out of his ears. Gates then jumped out of his plush chair which has all those cool, multi-coloured flashing buttons on the arms, grabbed the phone and flung it across the room. Gates began shrieking, "This can not be true!!! It is a lie!!! Everybody is always lieing to me!!!" While slamming his clenched fist on the table and spluttering foam out of his mouth, Gates screamed "I want my secretary!!! Where is my secretary!!! I want my secretary!!! Bormann!!! Martin Bormann!!!" Bill Gates then came crashing down onto his hands and knees and started to frantically chew-away at the carpet.

The Hellgate demo is a 3D first-person perspective combat game written in a game programming language called STOS. It will run on all 1 meg Atari ST computers from a floppy disk. However, loading the game from disk does take a considerable bit of time so a hard drive is recommended. The bad news is 2 megs of RAM will be needed to run Hellgate from a hard drive. The driver software that makes it possible for your ST to communicate with the hard drive does consume some memory and on a 1 meg system that would not leave enough RAM for running the game.

The plot for Hellgate is the usual story. Your mission, if you should decide to accept it, is to blast your way through a robot-infested Neptune colony. Having played many Doom-type games on those Wintel machines, I naturally assumed my expert opinion would result in a "this sucks badly" rating for Hellgate. The first time I booted the game, I took one look at the graphics, waggled the mouse around a bit, immediately concluded that this indeed was a sucky game and quickly hit the off-button on my ST computer.

Hours later, a deep, dark urge began to overtake me. No, I didn't badly want to go to the bathroom. For some strange reason I wanted to play Hellgate on my Atari. Just like Bill Clinton, I always make a point of satisfying my deep, dark urges so I scampered back to the ST and reloaded the game.

Once you have selected the difficultly level (Dead Easy, Well'ard or Suicide), the game will begin on the first level in a small room. Movement in the game is done by mouse only. At first, you will probably find this method of control to be rather awkward but once you have become "one with the mouse", engaging the enemy will be a pleasurable experience. At the start, the only toy you can use against those big, bad, heavy-metal robots is one of those dinky pistols which are just like the ones you can buy from your local, disreputable 7-11 gun dealer. There are other weapons such as the shotgun and the chaingun which, once you find them, can be used to help send the baddies to the scrap heap.

Different weapons require different types of ammunition and it is a good idea to keep track of the amount of

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ammunition you have. At the bottom of the screen is a status bar. Going from left to right, the first item on the status bar shows the amount of ammo for the currently selected weapon. Next, the amount of your health is shown which ranges from 100 (You feel like a million bucks) down to zero (You are worm food). In the middle of the screen is a picture of your face. You look like a happy camper when your health is 100% but your face becomes uglier and uglier as your health decreases. When your health reaches zero, the graphical representation of your face looks like an almost exact duplicate of the President of GCACE. The next item on the status bar will report whether or not you are carrying a key. The game restricts you to carrying only one key at a time so doing a bit of running around the levels is required. The last thing on the status bar shows you your Armour strength which ranges from 100% to 0%.

Once the excitement of staring at the status bar has lost its appeal, you might as well start playing the game. Grab the mouse and start burning some rubber! The first thing you will notice is the frame-rate could be better. Also, as you move around, you will occasionally observe that some walls will disappear momentarily. In the first room there is a door. Move up to it and hit the space bar. The screen will go blank for a second and then you will find yourself in the next room. There are two robots in this room. If you just stand there like a big piece of hairy meat, the nasty bots will target you and quickly blast you into giblets.

Being an action oriented game, it is important that combat be either an exhilarating rush or, at the very least, mildly enjoyable. Engaging the enemies in Hellgate can be best described as "dancing with robots". The robots are rendered in 3D and, when they are facing directly at you, will target you with their weapons and start blasting chunks off of your health. If you want to reach the end of the level, you will need to move the mouse around until you are in a position where you are looking at the side or, even better, the backside of the first robot you want to attack. Now, you can fire at it once, or possibly several times, before having to reposition yourself because the robot, not being completely inebriated from consuming vast quantities of Vodka, will be turning to face you in order to achieve a target-lock on your head.

Combat becomes even more challenging due to the fact that there are rooms, such as the second room in the first level of Hellgate, which contain two robots. While shooting at the side of one robot, the other robot could be facing in your direction. When dealing with two enemies, you may find yourself almost constantly dancing around the room and only have limited opportunities to fire your weapon without fear of being instantly whacked away at by the other bot. While concentrating on hitting one robot, I have occasionally forgotten about the other guy and suddenly have found myself screaming out-loud when I realise the other robot is attacking me.

These gun battles can sometimes contain a hidden surprise. When you hit the left mouse button to fire your gun, there are times when the gun does not fire. I think the problem is that the game is not always properly checking the status of the mouse button so it sometimes misses the mouse click. If you want to, you could consider this feature to be a simulation of your gun jamming which adds some realism to your fight for survival.

It must be said there is a certain amount of satisfaction to be had when you finally do score a kill. When a robot finally expires, it first emits a scream, transforms itself into crumpled garbage and then falls down onto the floor. One feature which should be added to the game is the ability to piss on the remains of your defeated foe. Oh well, can't have everything.

While committing ethnic cleansing of all robot-kind, there are various objects scattered around the levels which will help you in your holy quest such as medi-packs and ammo. Just like the bots, these objects are also rendered in 3D. Portions of these objects and the walls have the exact same colours which would make medi-packs and such items hard to spot except for the fact that the objects slowly rotate. The variously types of robots also share some of the same colours as the walls. More work really needs to be done with respect to colour selections.

Overall, I am sure you will find this demo to be fun to play. Many of the commercial games for the ST which have been released over the past 14 or so years have significantly less gameplay appeal than Hellgate does. Hellgate, unfortunately, is not a finished product. If the frame rate and other features such as more distinctive colours for robots and objects could be improved, this game would be a must addition for every ST gamer's collection.